

Recycle Right: What to do with Lids, Caps and Tops

Paul Goldberg
Recycling Committee

One of the irksome questions for those of us attempting to recycle right is whether we can recycle the tops to items such as yogurt containers, mayonnaise jars, tennis ball cans, tops to canned vegetables and those small plastic screw-on caps to milk and shampoo containers. Here are the basic rules for Arlington's curbside program when considering lids and caps:

- 1) If a lid or cap is uniformly made of the same material, i.e. all plastic or all metal, it can be recycled. Caps to mayonnaise and jelly jars that contain an integral rubber seal are no problem; you can consider them all metal.
- 2) If a lid or cap is smaller than 2 or 3 inches, it cannot be recycled unless it is attached to its container, as these smaller sized lids and caps cannot be handled independently at the recycling sorting and separation facility. Lids/caps larger than 2-3 inches can be recycled without being attached.
- 3) If the lid or cap is the same material as the container you want to keep them together. Attach the plastic cap/lid to the plastic container or place the metal top in the can before putting it in your recycling bin.
- 4) If the top and container are of different materials, such as metal and glass, do not attach. Large lids can go in your bin to be recycled. If the lid is small, the best choice is to throw it away.

Now that we understand the basics, there are a few details that might help you recycle right. Pop-off lids on jugs of milk or water are just tiny bits of chaos and should be thrown away. Screw tops on a milk carton can be attached, but only after you partially flatten the jug. An empty jug - even with a lid screwed on - will be compressed in the truck and the lid will pop off. If the container is flattened completely, the recycling sorting and separation machinery will mis-identify it as cardboard.

When in doubt about whether or not a lid/cap or any other material is recyclable, throw it out. It is always environmentally better to throw something away than to contaminate the recycling stream.

Arlington Recycling Committee welcomes your involvement as a recycler, as a volunteer at recycling events, or as a committee member. Information can be found at arlingtonma.gov/recycling, or use the Town's Request/Answer page. Select "Ask a Question" and choose the "Recycling" category so your question is routed to Arlington's Recycling Coordinator.